



CONTEMPLATIVE PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I suggest that using contemplative pedagogy and practices in the classroom will help in fostering transformative learning which plays a fundamental role in bringing a positive social and political reform in the society. Contemplative pedagogy and its practices are quiet instrumental in promoting transformative learning in youth during Higher Education as it helps in establishing a better understanding of existing thoughts, emotions, feelings and beliefs and helps in altering it for good, hence all this can be directed towards bringing a radical and progressive change in self and society. It also develops and improves resilience among students. Critical Pedagogy invites both students and teachers to critically investigate and analyze the political and social issues prevailing in the society, nation, religion or culture as well as the consequences of social inequity or injustice and whereas contemplative is cultivating self awareness, a fusion of both the unified pedagogies into teaching and learning will help in resolving stress and pain on the individual and a collective level. Hence this essay is written to promote developing a framework or a curriculum that provides room for applying contemplative pedagogy into existing education practice and policy. Incorporating its practices into learning will help students to develop a 'democratic heart' as well as a 'democratic society'. This paper focuses on how cultivating mindfulness in education system especially during higher studies can work as a therapeutic aid in managing stress, depression, anxiety issues and will enhance learning, developing a conducive teacher-student relationship, enhancing creative attention and active student's engagement in classroom and other activities.

KEY WORDS: Contemplative pedagogy & practices, transformative learning, mindfulness, youth development and mental well being, social change

Objective of the Paper:

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the limited knowledge on contemplative pedagogy and its practices in higher education and to throw some light on its re-emergence (contemporary contemplative practices) in educational philosophy. Students may benefit academically and personally from contemplative practices. Integrating contemplative practices into a higher education (curriculum) is becoming a popular pedagogical tool among some pedagogues, academics and educators in recent times as it is believed to enhance the learning, concentration and mindfulness skills in students and also aids in engaging them into social welfare activities which make them feel good as it protects a deep sense of interdependence and fellowship. With the help of this paper we will talk about the implications of contemplative education and its practices for the development of conscious and willful approaches of learning and developing teacher-student relationship and equity. It will show how enhanced self awareness through the means of transformative learning and mindfulness can increase self-care and positivity in youth resulting in their mental well being and overall development. In the world of super complexities especially with an increased pressure of navigating through the new technologies emerging every day and ever growing competition which has affected our lives big time and constantly draws our attention, the emerging field of contemplative practices will lead to intellectual transformation of individuals, manifestation of thoughts, humanization, self-regulation and deep inner understanding and thus maintaining a balance in thoughts and life.

Statement of Research Problem:

The question that occurs in our mind often- what is the most serious threat to our contemporary wellbeing today?

With rampant growth in technology and globalization, we all can examine a common problem, a severe disconnect between the mind, body, heart and the world. There are host of problems and challenges surrounding us in everyday life and it might be due to intense economical, political, social, ecological and emotional instability. Now the disappointing fact is that the prevailing or existing education fails to address the need to deal with these crisis or stressful situations and do not teach our youth how to re-establish connect between different dimensions of human life.

Hence through this paper, my idea is to introduce and promote sustainability in Higher Education and explore more possibilities in the burgeoning contemplative education movement for reconnection offered by holistic approaches to learning.

Definitions for keywords:

Contemplative Pedagogy: Is defined as "a philosophy of education that promotes the use of contemplative practices that deepen awareness, concentration and insight" (Vanderbilt University, 2012).

Contemplative practices: Are defined as "teaching methods that support the individual's ability to concentrate deeply and achieve insight" (The Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society, 2000-2009).

Mindfulness: Is defined as "the capacity to concentrate in the here and now (Hill, 2006), with constant observation of present experience" (Deikman, 1996).

"Mindfulness is a skill that is the foundation for contemplative practices" (Burggraf & Grossenbacher, 2007).

Transformative Learning: *Transformational Learning Theory* which was originally developed by Jack Mezirow in 1991 has been described as, "constructivist, an orientation which holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is, central to making meaning and hence learning" (*Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, Jack Mezirow 1991).

Youth development and well being: *The World Health Organisation (WHO)* defines **holistic health** as "viewing man in his totality within a wide ecological spectrum, and...emphasizing the view that ill health or disease is brought about by an imbalance or disequilibrium of man in his total ecological system and not only by the causative agent and pathogenic evolution" (*Traditional Medicine, Proposed Programme Budget for the Financial Period 1981 Geneva, Switzerland: WHO; 1978*).

Mental health: a state of **well-being**...The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO definition of health as contained in its constitution: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organisation).

Social change: Is defined it as "change in the overall societal structure and relationship of a society" (Horton and Hunt).

Introduction

Contemplative practices is considered as a 'science' as well as an 'art' of self-understanding, inner-spacing/engineering which could be used as a therapeutic aid for youth development and their mental well-being. "Contemplative Pedagogy is often posited as inner-directed practices of helping students find balance and wholeness in their lives" (Peter Kaufman, *Critical Contemplative Pedagogy*, 2011). Contemplative studies focuses on the inner self of students and providing students enough space in the classroom for innovative thinking and using creativity. Contemplation revolves around introspection (looking within), reflection (critical thinking or brooding) and attention (desired actions), Freire's classic definition praxis, reflection + action = social transformation. Transformative learning theory by Clark, 1991, "the process of 'perspective transformation' has three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (changes in lifestyle)." Researches and theories prove that critical reflection triggers transformative learning.

Contemplative practices offer instructors the opportunity to challenge students to integrate their own experiences into their learning, and accordingly changing their relationship to the material they are studying, leading to better retention of the material, as they now have a personal context in which to remember it (Barbezat & Pingree, 2012). Contemplative practices quiet the mind, cultivate

compassion, focus attention and support the capacity for deep concentration (Craig, 2011; The Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society, 2000-2009).

New Directions for Community Colleges (2010) devoted an entire issue to Contemplative Teaching and Learning. The academic program in The Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society has awarded over 100 Contemplative Practice fellowships (funded by the Fetzer institute), to faculty of various disciplines (Grace, 2011).

The aim of education is to develop a just and democratic society (Giroux, 1983). Education should be capable of identifying and redressing the injustices, inequalities and myths of an often oppressive world (Gruenewald, 2003). Education is the only means for a more civilized, cultured and socialized society. Socrates, Plato, Augustine, Karl Marx, Mann, Parker and Dewey as great political thinkers, philosophers, theorists, socialists and education revolutionists had a major role to play in the reconstruction and development of the society. From Plato's text of Socrates, he posits that: "*The unexamined life is not worth living*" (38a). He believes that to be truly wise in society, one need to take a private pursuit of truth in order to fully realize life and what is out there.

College and Universities are an incredible source of learning as people from different cultures, backgrounds come together to share their life experiences. Pedagogues and educators are working constantly to form unique hybrid pedagogy and use it in the classroom which has a blend of many education practices i.e. critical, contemplative, social, emancipatory and liberatory.

Unlike traditional education framework, contemplative education approach treats students with more humanness. The objective of this paper is not to disregard the traditional education system but to bring about some constructive and progressive changes in the existing one which is more humane in nature and is capable of dealing with the day to day atrocities of life with the help of transformative learning, self-transformation and mindfulness.

As compared to critical education which dates back around 1970s, contemplative pedagogy is a comparatively a new movement within education but the science of contemplative practices dates back some thousands of years but it is re-emerging or implementation into education is very recent (1990s). It is still in the phase where a lot of research work had to be undertaken as it is still in its evolving and emerging phase. Contemplative practices are present in societies around the world. Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism all focus on introspection and first person investigation. Western mystics from Christianity, Judaism and Islam also explore contemplative practices (Roth, 2006).

The growing field of contemplative practices in pedagogy shows promise in providing a model for transformative learning that rejects the professor as authority paradigm and seeks to support students in learning from themselves and their experiences (Burggraf & Grossenbacher, 2007; Miller, 1994). Contemplative practices like meditation and mindfulness have been accepted in other cultures and disciplines (Hart, 2004) and numerous studies support the efficacy of meditation on mental health and human development (Shapiro, Brown & Astin, 2008). Yet, until recently, contemplative pedagogy has been absent in higher education (Hart, 2004). Contemplative practices can be used as a fundamental tool to achieve academic excellence of the students.

Contemplative education is a set of pedagogical practices designed to cultivate conscious awareness in an ethical-relational context in which the values of personal growth, learning, moral living, and caring for others are nurtured. Contemplative education has therapeutic and healing properties which can be used as a creative-expressive therapy and to alter the perspectives. It is a unique way of learning how artistic practices can be used in conceptualizing and developing academic literacy. This emerging field of contemplative pedagogy and its practices into traditional pedagogy may provide framework for bringing in the intellectual transformation, improved learning, concentration, self-knowledge along with social activism among students. If the teachers or educators fails to enlighten the students and do not develop a sense of social responsibility and a need for social change, then all our efforts will be futile. We need to bring both the teachers and learners at the same pedestal where they are looked upon equally and learning is done through real lived life experiences from both the means. We cannot blindly depend on an education system that only fills students head with definitions, facts, figures, set principals and logic rather than imparting real knowledge and thereafter we can't expect to bring in radical social change based on outer directed education system. We need a pedagogy that contemplates the race, law, imbalance and injustice, the pedagogy that can change the world. As Freire (2000) in *Pedagogy of Oppressed* argues, there is a need to abolish the teacher-students contradiction whereby the teacher is the only one who teaches and the students are the only one who learns. Through the amalgamation of contemplative practices into critical education system we can achieve more compassionate social action.

Apparently more and more educators, academicians, teachers, professors, pedagogues are introducing and implementing contemplative practices into the classroom with the intent of developing transformative learning and active social engagement amongst the students. They also use it to address the issues of social justice amongst the students. But one of the important aspects here is that if the

educators do not cultivate these principles and practices in his / her life how he/she can promote transformative learning, self understanding and social justice in the classrooms.

We need a non-dualistic teaching and learning system where teacher and learner are not differentiated. Non-duality is a key of Contemplative practices as it teaches us to focus not solely on our needs but also to the needs of others. As a Buddhist nun Pema Chodron (1994) speaks about 'me versus you' and 'us versus them'.

Self-transformation:

As *Sadhguru (Inner Engineering-A Yogi's Guide to Joy)* quoted beautifully "the only solution for all the ills that plague humanity is self-transformation. Self-transformation is not incremental self-improvement. Self-transformation is achieved not by morals or ethics or attitudinal or behavioral changes, but by experiencing the limitless nature of who we are. Self-transformation means nothing of the old remains. It is dimensional shift in the way you perceive and experience life."

Mindfulness:

At the heart of contemplative practice, is mindfulness: awareness of the present moment (Roth, 2006). Professor Mark Williams, former Director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, "mindfulness means knowing directly what is going on inside and outside us, moment by moment."

The concept of mindfulness or meditation or yoga is a way to know the 'first person' or 'self', it is a way of living which helps individuals to deal with stressful situations and day to day worries efficiently. Particularly when applied in educational context, these practices help students deal with crisis, pressures, competition, fear, anxiety and depression.

Studies and researches over the period of time have shown that practicing mindfulness had helped people not only physically but most importantly psychologically, emotionally and socially. Mindfulness is a state of being conscious and aware of one's own thoughts, emotions feelings and surroundings.

According to **Jon Kabat-Zinn**, "mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally."

Researchers have found that there exists a strong relationship between mindfulness and psychological (mental) well being.

Now the question arises how does mindfulness impact education? In a meta-analysis of studies related to the use of meditation in education, Shapiro, et al. (2008), found that mindfulness skills help develop attention and information processing, and may have the added benefits of increasing resiliency to stress, as well as improve academic achievement.

Contemplative teaching practices:

1. Silent Sitting Meditation
2. Compassion Practices
3. Walking Meditation
4. Deep Listening
5. Mindfulness
6. Yoga
7. Calligraphy
8. Chant
9. Guided Meditations
10. Nature Observation
11. Self-inquiry

Grace, Fan. (2011). *Learning as a path, not a goal: Contemplative Pedagogy – its principles and practices, Teaching, theology and religion*. Volume 14, Issue 2, April 2011.

Many contemplative practices have been developed over the last thousand years, The Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society has created a "Tree of Contemplative Practices" that represent different categories of practices: 1) Stillness, 2) Activist, 3) Generative Prayers, 4) Ritual/Cyclical, 5) Relational, 6) Creation Process; and 7) Movement Practices. The roots of the Tree of Contemplative Practices symbolize the two foundational intentions of all Contemplative practices: development of awareness and promotion of wisdom.

The Tree of Contemplative Practices: CMind: the centre for Contemplative Mind in Society. "The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind) transforms higher education by supporting and encouraging the use of contemplative/ introspective practices and perspectives to create active learning and research environment that look deeply into experience and meaning for all in service of a more just and compassionate society."

Conclusion

It is evident that contemplative practices often use artistic activities like meditation, yoga, painting, music, nature gazing, calligraphy, photography, dance etc for transformative learning and in the essay certain practices have been recorded

above which were given by Fan Grace and by Cmind.

There is evidence that engagement with artistic activities, either as an observer of the creative efforts of others or as an initiator of one's own creative efforts, can enhance one's moods, emotions, and other psychological states as well as have a salient impact on important physiological parameters (Staricoff R, Loppert S. Integrating the arts into health care).

Over the past decade, health psychologists have cautiously begun looking at how the arts might be used in a variety of ways to heal emotional injuries, increase understanding of one-self and others, develop a capacity for self-reflection, reduce symptoms, and alter behaviors and thinking patterns (Camic, PM. Playing in the Mud).

The idea that creative expression can make a powerful contribution to the healing process has been embraced in many different cultures. Throughout recorded history, people have used pictures, stories, dances, and chants as healing rituals (Graham-Pole J.).

Apart from these activities and practices there can be many other creative pursuits as well which can be incorporated for enhancing the teaching and learning. I also believe that there should be setting up 'Contemplation Centers' or similar setup within the University or College which can help the students as well as academicians and professionals to develop awareness, self-knowledge, dialogical skills, compassion, creativity, empathy, inclusive and caring leadership among staff and students, so that they can participate in creating an inclusive and caring institutional and communal culture and instill humanistic values in their future workplaces. It generates social activism, a deep sense of responsibility, leadership, humanistic approach and moreover develops academy-field connection. We visualize a peaceful world build on the ideas of justice and cooperation. Building trust and appreciation in oneself and for others is the need of the hour.

By assessing and analysing the use of these processes and practices in clinical trials, one can determine how others have found benefits in tying the intricacies of artistic meaning of contemplative practices to the complexities of health and wellness. It is noted that participants in the mindfulness therapy group, in particular, show improvement on measures of anxiety, anger, depression, overall stress symptoms and mood disturbance. However much of the research work to test how mindfulness and contemplation practices affect people had been tried and tested in the clinical setup by psychologists and very less research is done to show its impact on students in a classroom setup. Despite the lack of empirical studies measuring the effects of contemplative pedagogy on students success, interest in integrating contemplative practices in higher education is growing day by day around the world.

Research in higher education settings on mindfulness-based meditation particularly the *Mindfulness-based stress reduction*, MBSR-method and stress indicates that mindfulness benefits to students (Shapiro, Brown & Astin, 2008).

Apparently we all imagine an education system that could promote the discovery of meaning, purpose, thoughts, beliefs and values and seeks to serve more humanization. We need an education that enables and develops a personal introspection and contemplation ultimately resulting in the realization of our inextricable connection or interdependency to each other. We need to come up with a more heart and mind opening pedagogy which could lead to true social change--non-duality, interdependency and a sense of fellowship, deeper insight, sustainable living, community development and a just society.

The experiential methods that were developed within the contemplative traditions years ago offer a rich set of tools for exploring the mind, the heart, the society and the world. When they are integrated with conventional practices, an enriched research methodology and pedagogy become available for deepening and enlarging perspectives, leading to lasting solutions to the problems we confront which when unmet often lead to stress, anxiety, depression. Higher education should be envisioned as an opportunity to cultivate self and social awareness in the youth in order to stimulate inquiry into what is most meaningful to us as interconnected human beings.

In conclusion, what has been presented in this paper is that contemplative pedagogy and its practices in an existing education is an innovative approach which could be successfully be practiced by pedagogues, educators, trainers, professionals, teachers. This review suggests that more attention to the application of contemplative pedagogy to educational practices is needed and more studies and research should be done in this unique field to redefine the aims of education and re-ponder the role of curriculum. We need a curriculum which builds a strong bond between teacher-student is friendlier and humane in nature.

I Shor, in his pedagogical analysis *When Students Have Power* (1996), stated that the socio-cultural environment of the classroom has to be reshaped and student's roles should be changed from objects to critical and active participants so that they could struggle to find themselves (Shor, 1992; 1996).

The ideas presented here should be taken as pieces of an ongoing and developing conversation and research. By all means, the pedagogy that I am referring to is

still very much just coming into existence and beginning to display signs of future potential into education. The purpose of this essay is to contribute to this emerging dialogue, encourage others to advance these ideas further, and inspire educators to incorporate a contemplative framework in their curriculums. However it is true that there is no end to the world's or personal problems but with the help of contemplative pedagogy and practices during Higher education will develop a conscious attempt to be an active agent of the social change. However we need more educators and trainers to broaden teachers understanding of this approach and also need active efforts to introduce and promote it internationally. It is the need of the hour to build an education that doesn't not burden the young ones with 'my knowledge' concept and do not take away their freedom and creativity, that young scientist that is hidden in every one of us. It's time to encourage constructivism in education.

In the words of the Holiness, Dalai Lama the importance of Contemplative study and its practices:

"It's a new field of inquiry for the scientists and researchers into the quality of mind, mental process, sensorial process and the effects of meditation and mindfulness on the brain. There is great value of scientists and their studies in contemplative study and practices as then in the world we could think of populating the importance and implications of contemplative studies and practices. It's now the utmost duty of the scientists that how the contemplative study can be applied in different life settings to attain inner peace, harmony and mental development."

(An Interactive Dialogue with his Holiness, the Dalai Lama, Richard J. Davidson and Amishi Jha)

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